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ABSTRACT

Community organization theories are reviewed and principles of social work group practice are delineated for directors of special education. Focused on are such aspects as worker competencies and attitudes, strategies for community change, and organizational structure. The author briefly related the theoretical information to his experience with local school districts in conducting a census of handicapped children. (CL)

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How Community Organization Theory Can Help The Special Education Administrator

by

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I. Statement of the Problem

The theme of this paper reflects the author's belief that community organization as a social work process should be part of the range of skills which the director of special education can utilize in exercising his leadership function. The current zeitgeist in special education administration perceives the director as utilizing all community agency resources in assuring handicapped children equal educational opportunities. Thus understanding the theories and principles of community organization becomes a critical problem for the director of special education.

A. Importance of the problem

The director of special education must utilize the resources of the entire "functional community" which is concerned with handicapped children. The importance of knowing how to best utilize these resources is understood when the following unmet needs of handicapped children are considered:

1. Of 26,983 school districts in the U.S. only 6,711 of them operated one or more special classes.[1]
2. Mackie[2] in a recent and comprehensive study estimated that we are serving 50% of the speech and hearing handicapped, 50% of the visually handicapped, 8% of the emotionally disturbed and 33% of the retarded.

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[1]Romaine P. Mackie, Special Education in the United States (New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1969), p. 40.

[2]ibid.

Furthermore, an administrative trend in providing educational services for the handicapped calls for the formation of co-operatives among school districts. That is two or more school districts agree on a formal or informal basis to jointly provide services for handicapped children.[3] This problem has many ramifications which certainly calls for community organization skills.

B. Relevance of problem to author's interests

During the spring of 1970 the author was assigned to the Ingham Intermediate School District to assist in implementing Public Act 220 of the 1969 Michigan Legislature.[4] This act requires local school districts in co-operation with the appropriate intermediate district and all relevant agencies to conduct a two phase census of all handicapped children.

Phase I of the census requires an accurate count of every handicapped child in the district be completed no later than April 1, 1970. Children ages 0-21 are to be included. Phase II requires that a plan for providing needed services be formulated and that a copy of this plan be submitted to the State Department of Education not later than September 1, 1970.

The implementation of this Act can be facilitated by the community organization process and a thorough knowledge of its principles and theories.

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[3]Robert M. Isenberg and Francis E. Lord, Co-operative Programs in Special Education (Washington, D.C.: National Education Association, 1964), p. 11.

[4]For the original text of the bill see "Senate Bill 891, 1969 Michigan Legislature", available from Documents Room, Michigan State Capitol Building, Lansing, Michigan.

C. Operational definitions of terms used

Before proceeding further the following terms are here defined:[5]

1. Community organization - "a process by which a community identifies its needs or objectives, orders (or ranks) these needs or objectives, develops the confidence and will to work at these needs or objectives, finds the resources (internal or external) to deal with these needs or objectives, takes action in respect to them and in doing so extends and develops co-operative and collaborative attitudes and practices in the community."

2. Geographic community - "all the people in a specific geographic area, i.e. village, town,.....neighborhood."

3. Functional community - "people who share some common interest or function such as.....education...."

4. Specific content objective - "an organization becomes concerned about some needed reform in the community... The success of this process tends to be measured primarily in terms of the degree to which the.....goal....is secured."

5. General content objective - "...objective of effective planning and operation of special group of services in the community." Unique in that it makes a conscious effort to involve an elite group.

6. Process objective - "initiation of a process in which all the people of a community are involved."

II. Theories of Community Organization

A. Philosophy and Method of Community Organization

A philosophy and methodsof community organization are prerequisite to functioning for as Friedlander[6] says:

they"...form the framework under which a professional

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[5]Definitions from Murray G. Ross, Community Organization, Theory, Principles, and Practice (New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1967) p. 18-40.

[6]Walter A. Friedlander, Concepts and Methods of Social Work (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1967) p. 238-239.

> practice operates and only as we can generalize between similiar situations that we can use principles to guide our practice. The C.O. worker who practices intuitively meets each situation as one so unique and individual that he does what he feels works at the moment. The disciplined and professional worker makes use of principles and concepts, which he uses with consistency in similiar situations. ...a bag of tricks will never substitute for professionai method."

Furthermore, the director of special education can make maximum use of community organization if he adopts social work methods, values, and ethics. That is a dedication to democratic values, faith in resources and judgement of people, trust in democratic process and faith that they will take the correct action. Community organization is not a social work method when it uses manipulative and/or pressure techniques; furthermore, informing a few vocal people who influence others is not consistent with social work processes, values and philosophy.

The methods common to social casework, group work and community organization are as follows:

1. Social study and diagnosis
2. Assessing strengths in the diagnosis
3. Utilizing resources
4. Modification or change
5. Evaluation

Thus, by using the above methods the director of special education will have a task or goal centered approach engaging a variety of supporting services. The process form that emerges will be as follows:

1. Reconnaisance phase
2. Diagnostic phase
3. Planning or development phase
4. Implementation

With the philosophical basis expressed above, it is appropriate to next discuss some theories of community organization.

B. Theories of Community Organization

Ross in Community Organization, Theory, Principles and Practice provides an excellent framework within which to begin this discussion. He sees three primary orientations toward community organization:

1. Specific content objective (reform orientation)
2. General content objective (planning orientation)
3. Process objective or process orientation

The third approach seeks to develop community organization process, silf-determination, co-operation and the capacity to solve community problems.

Ross does not believe that the goals of the worker should be imposed on the client community, thereby "subverting the process orientation". He sees self-determination, community pace, growth in community capacity and the will to change as evolving from the community itself and supporting his view of the community organization process.

Ross lists the competencies and attitudes of the worker involved in community organization.[7] They are as follows:

1. Understand the objectives of community organization;
2. Be in sympathy and support these objectives.
3. Be objectively able to regard behavior in the community.
4. Be skillful in associating himself with the community organization process.
5. Be able to contribute effectively in respect to content.

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[7]Ross, op. cit., pp. 69-71.

Ross sees three main criticisms of his conception of community organization.[8] They are (1) emphasis placed on co-operation, (2) C.O. workers interference with communities and finally (3) C.O. is a slow process. These criticisms are clarified and made congruous with his philosophy. Ross offers the following hypotheses about community life.[9]

1. Multiple Factor Theory - there is no single factor which makes for community intergration.
2. Social Structure - this is positively related to the degree of intergration existing or possible in the community.
3. Sociocultural Patterns - every community has traditional ways of behaving which to some extent determines whether people will participate and co-operate.
4. Sub-group relationships - relationships between sub-groups strongly influence community intergration.
5. Leadership - sub-group leaders play an important role in determining degree of community intergration.
6. Symbols and Rituals - values, institutions, and celebrations are a stimulus to community intergration.

With above hypotheses as basic premises Ross lists the principles of community organization.[10] They are as follows:

1. Discontent with existing conditions in the community must initiate and/or nourish the development of the association.
2. Discontent must be focused and channeled into organization, planning, and action in respect to specific problems.
3. The discontent which intiates community action must be widely shared in the community.
4. The association must involve leaders (both formal and informal) identified with and accepted by major sub-groups in the community.
5. The association must have goals and methods of high acceptability.
6. The program should include some activities with emotional content.
7. The associaltion should seek to utilize the latent good will in the community.
8. The association must develop effective lines of communication within the association and between the association and the community.
9. The association should seek to support and strengthen the groups which it brings together.

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[8]Ross, op. cit., pp. 74.

[9]Ross, op. cit., pp. 105-124.

[10]Ross, op. cit., Chapters 6 and 7.

Ross sees the role of the worker (1) as a guide, (2) as an enabler, (3) as an expert, (4) as a therapist. As a guide the worker helps the community establish and find the means of achieving its own goals. The connotation is that the worker helps the community move in the direction it chooses.

Next some aspects of Warren's theories as expounded in Consensus and Confrontation in Community Change[11] will be considered. He sees the nature of change in contemporary society as being unique because (1) widespread belief that change is subject to human control, (2) growing awareness that change can be initiated, (3) confusion regarding change strategies and their appropriateness.

Warren however feels that most change is not the result of purposive action but the result of "many social forces working themselves out".[12] Thus most purposive change at the community level is only a response to problems, it is secondary rather than basic.

Another basic premise of Warren's is that social welfare agencies are concerned with system maintenance. He feels this is a result of two factors: (1) the middle class have a favored position in the existing order in agencies and (2) those who have a favored position in the existing order would be threatened by drastic change. Thus significant change is difficult to bring about at the community level. However, Warren gives us a model as an aid to those seeking a strategy to bring about community change.

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[11]Mimeograghed report entitled, "Consensus and Confrontation in Community Change", delivered by Roland Warren on May 20, 1969 at Institute of Human Relations of American Jewish Committee.

[12]Warren, op. cit. p. 1.

The " action system" is a scheme for activating the horizontal elements of the community's structure and can be presented in the five-phase model.[13]

1. Initial systemic environment
2. Inception of the action system
3. Expansion of the action system
4. Operation of the expanded action system
5. Transformation of the action system

In applying this action system an opposing configuration may become apparent.

To explain the phenomemon Warren suggests there are two kinds of community action. In one there is general agreement. The principle problem is apathy; it is easy to utilize collaborative techniques and engage all parties in the five-phase model and formulate plans on the basis of discussions. In the other action system there is "dissensus". If the collaborative approach is utilized, goals would be defeated. The obstacle is active opposition and obtaining a consensus will defeat the goal. This major segment of purposive change has been neglected and the professionals role in it may not be that of the enabler but that of the adversary.

The next theorists that will be considered are Morris and Rein. In their article "Goals, Structures and Strategies for Community Change"[14] the thesis is submitted that success in achieving a goal in a community depends on the use of a structure and strategy appropriate to the goal and that no method is effective in all circumstances. They feel all organizations

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[13] Warren, op. cit., p. 4

[14] Morris and Rein, "Goals, Structures and Strategies for Community Change", in Kramer and Specht, ed., Readings in Community Organization Practice, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1967), pp. 188-200

will have one of two basic aims, pluralism or change and intergration or homogeneity. Agencies which are primarily committed to achieving their own self-established ends are committed to heterogenity and pluralism while agencies which conform to acceptable common standards are committed to homogeneity and intergration. This type of agency will often express its goals in broad diffuse terms. This is necessary since specific statements may breed conflict.

Thus they feel certain strategies and structures are more appropriate for goals of change and other structures and strategies are more consistent with goals of intergration. Strategy involves broad directives while tactics deals with details. They see two main strategies:

1. Co-operative rationality: composed of consensus, legitimacy, rationalism, avoidance of controversy and a fusion of ends and means. This approach attempts to set goals about which nearly all the participants are in agreement. They see a committee in this situation not as a working group but as a platform which reaffirms and thereby legitimizes decisions arrived at in private.

2. Individual rationality: its chief commitment is to the pursuit of its own interests. Results are achieved by persuasion, coercion or by any suitable means.

They feel a strategy of individual rationality is best suited to goals of change where change is the goal. Co-operative rationality is suited to conformity when groups are asked to accept common goals and standards.

The structors of the organization is an important factor. The federated is an association of autonomous substructures. The simple structure is composed of a homogenous group who share common goals and values.

Next a discussion of Jack Rothman[15] is appropriate since he did not see the above two as mutually exclusive. Furthermore, Rothman should be noted for his rejection of the enabler role of the C.O. worker. He feels it is legitimate for the worker to utilize a "democratic social action role". He sees an activist, social change orientation as compatible with democratic process and not contrary to the achievement of functional capacity goals.

Thus goals may be achieved with varying degrees of directiveness and intervertion by the practioner.

William Ried in "Inter-Organizational Co-ordination in Social Welfare, A Theoretical Approach to Analysis and Intervention,"[16] defines "Inter-organizational Co-ordination" as an exchange or resources to achieve organizational goals. He borrows from Etzioni and makes a salient point: goals of an organization can best be inferred from its operations. That is the effective goals of an organization reflected in its decisions or actions are more relevant than its formal paper goals. He talks of three modes of co-existence:

1. Independence - uses resources to accomplish its goals, neither needs the other.
2. Interdependence - if its goals can be achieved most effectively with the resources of the other
3. Conflict - goal achievement occurs at the expense of goal achievement of others.

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[15]Martin and Rein, op. cit., pp. 260-269

[16]Martin and Rein, op. cit., pp. 176-188

He makes two points which are especially striking: (1) interdependence is a function of decision makers in an organization and (2) crisis provoked interdependence diminishes as the crisis recedes.

Amitai Etzioni in "Organizational Control and Structure"[17] outlined his theories of how an organization controlled its members. His premise was that organizations had three means to check the quantity and quality of activity of its members. They are as follows:

1. Coersive power - physical control such as guns, locks and whips such as prisons.
2. Utilitarian power - material control such as money as in factories.
3. Identive power - symbolic control such as volunteer associations.

Different organizations use different kinds of power and generate different committments and alienation. Etzioni feels utilitarian power based on money is alienating and generates no committment. Furthermore, the more selective an organization is in its membership the less control it needs and the more effective it is in carrying out its goals.

Organizations that rely on identive power will usually have formal leaders emerge. These leaders may be called principals, administrators or co-ordinators. Control in these organizations is very dependent on personal qualities.

Since this discussion of theory began with Ross it is appropriate to close with a few viewpoints from Dunham's Community Welfare Organization, Principles and Practice. Dunham much like Ross provides the basis upon which all C.O. theory is based.

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[17] March, Edward, Ed., The Handbook of Organizations, (New York: The Rand McNally Co., 1965) pp. 650-677

They differ in one key area. Dunham felt that involvement of the total community could not be accomplished in any but the smallest community and that involvement of the total community should not be emphasized. He felt that community organization practice was the primary function of some agencies and that others would hardly become involved in it.

His philosophy can best be summed up as follows:[18]

> "Dunham considered it (the social work process) an aspect of the community organization practice, inextricably related to community organization. The worker has to engage in social action whether or not it is a special process. Both community organization and social action draw on common methods..."

He did not conclude that these functions were outside of social work nor did he feel they were particularly unique to social work.

III. Discussion of Data

The preceding discussion of theory has purposely eliminated any references to practical applications. However, constantly in the back of the author's mind was the question, "How can these theories be applied to the problem of conducting a census of handicapped children?"

In essence the problem is one of bridging the gap from theory to practice. Fortunately, this was not too difficult to do since the theories are explicit and provide a clear taxonomy for action. Such a discussion could double the length of this paper. Instead, a few examples of how community organization theory applied to the census of handicapped children will be given.

How does one deal with a school system that refuses to co-operate in the census? After all democratic means for gaining co-operation have been exhausted this becomes a problem in Social Policy

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[18] Encyclopedia of Social Work, (New York: National Association of Social Workers, Columbia University Press, 1965) Vol. XV. p. 185.

Formulation. Stage 6 in "A Model of Social Policy Formulation" may be the only correct way to handle this problem.

Why is it difficult to get agencies to co-operate and what strategies can be employed to encourage co-operation? Reid gives fresh new insight into this problem.

Another problem is committees that are bound to failure from the beginning because of poor composition. Morris and Rein have excellent suggestions concerning the composition of committees and "Survey Teams".

Finally, Warren gives us excellent insight as to how change comes about. In the example of the census, its concept and origin stem from State level impetus which is only a reflection of increased national emphasis on the handicapped.

These examples have not been evaluative. It is nearly impossible for someone "in the forest to see the trees"; also, it is difficult for an agent who utilizes structures and strategies of C.O. to evaluate them objectively.

IV. Conclusion

Finally, we arrive at the so what of this paper. To ask "How can C.O. theory be applied by the Director of Special Education " is the wrong question at this time. The theories of community organization have not been empirically validated. A better question is, "How can the practitioner use the findings of these theorists to sharpen his analysis of social situations with which he must deal?"

Community Organization theories can prove useful to the pactitioner.